21st CENTURY "TRUE" WOMANHOOD OR FROM MADONNA TO MADONNAS

LAKO Cristian

Abstract

This paper shows the way in which women succeeded in evolving from the true womanhood condition of the 19th century to that of modern womanhood of 21st century. The booming development of MEDIA has had a great impact on women's emancipation movement and gaining rights equal to those of men as MEDIA has reached such a level of power that it is can shape and reshape the ideas and ideals of all humankind.

Understanding women, both for themselves and for men, has always been a difficult task. This might seem quite a sexist remark on the account of the author of this essay – a man, but still, we all have to agree that any female entity, as well as any man, is a difficult quantifiable complex personality.

Humans have always tried to find a balance between what they want to be and what society has allowed them to become, but if men have been allowed to explore the world around them, women were confined to the boundaries and rules imposed on them by men. Up to the 19th century all Western societies were under the influence of the strongest institution ever, the Church. Church has constantly represented the power of men and patriarchy and has always been led by men. That is why the world was seen and presented from a male perspective. (It would have been very interesting to see a Bible written by female authors, keeping as a unique god a female god from the multitude of gods of the ancient world. The term *motherland* is a reminiscence of matriarchal times and it shows that thousands of years ago many tribes considered "mother earth" to be the origin of everything. Challenging the "patriarchal bible" could be the ultimate enterprise of feminism.) It is very obvious that the Bible is man centered and has always been seen by many as "the book of all books". That is why all western societies, since the establishment of the Catholic Church, have been using it as the ultimate truth about the origins of "man" and the world. Women have always been part of men's world, but the Bible and its preachers shaped women into what the Bible considered the woman as the ideal woman. The ideal woman was Madonna or Virgin Mary. Her attributes as a woman are those we can find as defining for most real women and fictional characters up to the 20th century: Piety, Purity, Submissiveness, and Domesticity. So the reflection of the Bible on the female population could be thought as "normal".

At the beginning of the Industrial Era, due to both science and technology and the developments in these fields, the Bible loses ground and so does the Church in favour of political parties. In order to hold a grip on its position it uses women to influence men. Women, supported by church (unimaginable before), gathered in associations to fight for different ideas. Soon they realized their power consists in number and start to claim rights for their own benefit – early feminism.

Jumping ahead in time, in the second half of the 20th century, we can see that a new "religion" was established, which is stronger, and more influential than Church, as it

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can go beyond political borders, prejudice, and can shape and reshape society. It also reopened the doors of "polytheism". This is the MEDIA.

"This is my church,
This is where I heal my hurts."
(Insomnia)

The *Webster's Dictionary* explains its meaning as "agencies of mass communication". Media Agencies have the power to create new gods and destroy old ones overnight. But most important, it allowed women to enter the realm of power and stardom.

In the early ages of the Media Era, women were not very far from what was thought to be the real womanhood. This happened because all the media was in the hands of men. Therefore they could control what should go on air, and what should be recreated or completely rejected and banned. So women were again confronted with rules forced upon them by men. In the 1920s and up to the early 1960s, the great majority of songs sung by females were pure, platonic love songs or simply joyous songs. In the mid 1960s we can observe a shift from the submissive-like attitudes of female singers to a less docile position. This coincides with the general revolt of the young against the society and with the appearance of the miniskirt and of the bikini. So songs like "These Boots" sung by Jane Sinatra is the first sign that women stand up and express what they feel in public. Frustration or will for independence are brought to light in songs like Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive", and considering that this is also the time when first movie clips appear, the influence on the audience is even bigger, not only through the attitude expressed against man but also through behaviour and clothes. In the late 1960s, with the song "It's Raining Man", women show that they also are entitled to behave like men do, and that is their right to get involved with whoever they feel right. Tom Jones' "She's a Lady" could also put a print on women as the song describes how a woman is expected to behave and be in the eyes of a "god".

In the 1970s, maybe under the influence of Rock 'n' Roll, the attitudes of liberty and libertinism are further exacerbated. Female rock bands, the same way as men bands do, use drugs and drink alcohol on stage. However, such acts were kept out of sight. But music was not just Rock 'n' Roll, and singers such as Tina Turner, among others, represented the other side of females in music.

In the 1980s, a new TV channel, MTV, appears. By this time, women are gaining access to leading positions, or they write lyrics, and compose songs. Soon they earn money and then can gain financial independence. From here they can be whoever they please, and they can show their true personality. Female singers take their freedom of expression a step further. Songs like "Push it" and "Like a Virgin", both through their lyrics and their video clips show that they are "out of control" in what morality is concerned.

However in the 1990, female singers and female groups proved to be even more successful. An example of real success is Madonna, the American pop singer. She started her career back in the early 1980s and has played probably all the roles a woman can play, that of an easy woman, of a saviour, of a mother, of a goddess etc. She has proved to be a strong, flexible woman, and she soon became a worldwide star, and her own master. She is also a mother of two children and is still capable to resist (face?) the new trends in music. Still, she is an icon of what a woman shouldn't have lacked in the perspective of men: Piety, Purity, Submissiveness, and Domesticity.

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Many more female singers appeared enjoying more or less financial success and being more or less submissive to men's world. Whitney Huston, Celine Dion, Mariah Carrey, Janet Jackson, and later Jennifer Lopez, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Beyonce, all influenced the attitudes of both the female audience and male audience as how a modern woman should be perceived: beautiful, successful in anything she does, powerful, respected, independent, sexy and sensual, and bitch if necessary, but still, loving, tender, and understanding.

Male bands and male singers have also influenced the image of women, as two kinds of showing their expectations. If in the beginning, women had a rather decorative role in the video clips, that of dumb blondes, now this has changed. For instance, Aerosmith often show in their video clips female characters that trick males, so this way they maybe want to further prove that intelligence is not a matter of gender. Or, Tom Jones obviously knows what he means by "Sex Bomb".

Female singers can also express what they want from men. For instance, Des'ree in "You Gotta Be", an engendered song:

"You gotta be bad, you gotta be bold,
you gotta be wiser
You gotta be hard, you gotta be tough,
you gotta be stronger
You gotta be cool, you gotta be calm,
you gotta stay together.
All I know, all I know
Love will save the day."

An example of bitchiness taken to extremes could be the song of Frankee("F.U.R.B."), Eamon's Ex-Girlfriend written as a response to the malicious lyrics of Eamon "Fuck It (I Don't Want You Back)". Frankee uses the same type of bad language to answer Eamon and also hurts the male arrogance.

It is worth mentioning that each song had been number one for several weeks in U.K. and other countries and by this they polarized the listeners according to their gender. This proves that women are no longer afraid to express how they feel, even in public.

Due to the media and its power to influence large masses of people, music can be used as a tool to promote feminist ideas willingly or unwillingly. Again, media can control both women and men, especially young ones, on how women are to be perceived regarding their attitudes towards life and men, regarding behaviour and also fashion. All successful women are presented and seen as models that can be followed in order to be successful.

As a conclusion, true womanhood in the terms of the 21st century can be summarized up considering the following song:

Bitch

I hate the world today
You're so good to me

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I know but I can't change
tried to tell you but you look at me like maybe I'm an angel underneath
innocent and sweet
Yesterday I cried
You must have been relieved to see the softer side
I can understand how you'd be so confused
I don't envy you
I'm a little bit of everything
all rolled into one

Chorus:
I'm a bitch, I'm a lover
I'm a child, I'm a mother
I'm a sinner, I'm a saint
I do not feel ashamed
I'm your hell, I'm your dream
I'm nothing in between
You know you wouldn't want it any other way

So take me as I am
This may mean you'll have to be a stronger man
Rest assured that when I start to make you nervous
and I'm going to extremes
tomorrow I will change
and today won't mean a thing

Chorus
Just when you think you've got me figured out
the season's already changing
I think it's cool you do what you do
and don't try to save me

Chorus
I'm a bitch, I'm a tease
I'm a goddess on my knees
when you hurt, when you suffer
I'm your angel undercover
I've been numbed, I'm revived
can't say I'm not alive
You know I wouldn't want it any other way
(Brooke Meredith)

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